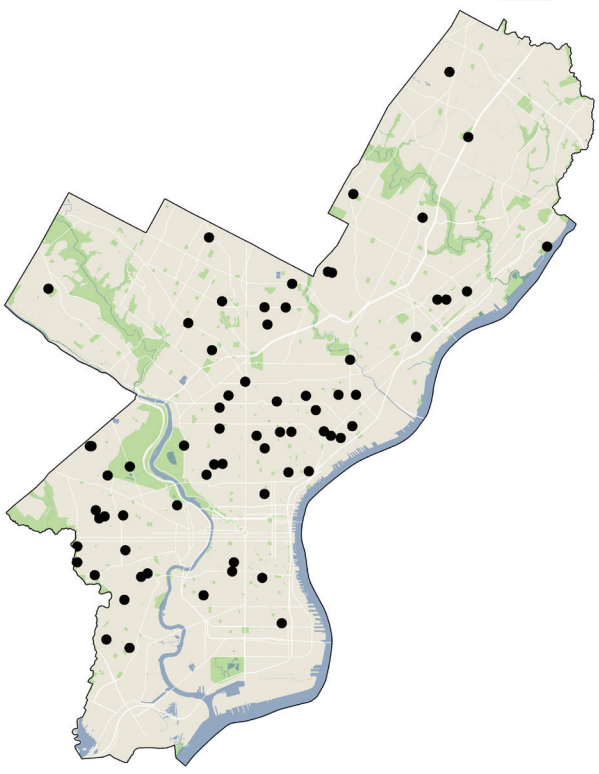
NEIGHBORHOODS & PUBLIC SPACES

Neighborhood public spaces including parks, recreation centers, libraries, and commercial corridors improve quality of life and strengthen residents' sense of community. Although many neighborhoods have experienced growth and renewal in recent years, others continue to face challenges caused by disinvestment, empty lots, and aging amenities. Through planning, Philadelphia can support vibrant, well-connected neighborhoods by guiding equitable investment and improving access to quality public spaces.

NEIGHBORHOODS AND PUBLIC SPACES IN PHILADELPHIA

- **Active commercial corridors can be found across the city.** The Planning Commission keeps data on 279 commercial corridors. Typical corridor businesses include convenience stores, groceries, pharmacies, dry cleaners, and delis across 16,230 occupied commercial spaces. Corridors generate local tax revenue, provide access to everyday amenities, jobs, opportunities for entrepreneurs, foster social interaction, and anchor public life.[1]
- **Neighborhoods are navigating population change:** Demographic and economic changes can bring investment that disproportionately reflects the preferences of newer residents and reduces access to amenities and spaces important to long-time residents.[2]
- **Philadelphia has a vast network of public spaces.** Nearly 40% of land in Philadelphia is dedicated to public spaces. This includes streets, sidewalks, parks and plazas as well as spaces like libraries, museums, and recreation centers. Philadelphia's inventory of public facilities includes 576 parks, 54 libraries, and 155 recreation centers.[3, 4, 5, 6]
- **The City has invested more than $650M in public spaces** since 2012. City-supported capital funds are used to support public spaces across the city including the Zoo, Free Library, Art Museum and department of Parks and Recreation. These investments help fund maintenance, structural improvements, and upkeep.[7]

Rebuild Sites That Have Received Improvements Since 2021



NEIGHBORHOODS AND PUBLIC SPACES CHALLENGES

- **Commercial corridor density:** Philadelphia has a relatively low density of small and mid-sized businesses, (18 business per 1,000 residents, compared to a national average of 26 business per 1,000 residents). The average

storefront vacancy rate in Philadelphia's commercial corridors is 17%. Underutilized commercial corridors limit local employment, tax revenue, and access to goods and services. Promoting higher business density along neighborhood commercial corridors presents an opportunity to strengthen economic activity, fill vacant spaces, and enhance neighborhood vibrancy.[8, 9, 10]

- **Impacts of development pressure:** The accelerating pace of residential and commercial development can strain community stability. Neighborhood instability and shifts in neighborhood culture can place displacement pressure on long-time residents and create tension between new and existing communities. Managing these changes often requires significant time and emotional labor from residents, and, in some cases, organized community responses that can disrupt social ties.[11, 12, 13]
- **Vacancy remains a significant challenge** across Philadelphia neighborhoods with approximately 40,000 vacant lots contributing to blight, reduced safety, lower property values, and limited economic activity. However, through public sector and nonprofit initiatives, many formerly vacant parcels have been converted into housing, community gardens, pocket parks, and other neighborhood assets that bring measurable benefits for safety, health, and neighborhood vitality.[14, 15, 16, 17]
- **Uneven access to neighborhood amenities:** Residents of North and West Philadelphia experience inequitable access to key neighborhood amenities such as recreation centers, libraries, grocery stores, and transit compared to more affluent neighborhoods. About 28% report lacking convenient access to safe and functional spaces that support daily life.[18, 19]

In the midst of these challenges are a range of local public programs supporting neighborhoods and public spaces. The Neighborhood Preservation Initiative (NPI) has invested $150 million for neighborhood infrastructure improvements and small business assistance while the Rebuild program has allocated over $500 million to upgrade 72 parks, recreation centers, and libraries in high-need neighborhoods. These upgrades include removing barriers to safety and accessibility by adding ADA-compliant facilities, stormwater management, renovated courts, and updated play equipment. The Philadelphia Land Bank makes publicly owned vacant and underused parcels available for productive community uses, and greening and stabilization initiatives in partnership with the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's LandCare program have transformed more than 12,000 vacant lots.[20, 21, 22]

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

It is important to invest in neighborhoods and community resources to maintain and improve them for future generations. *Phiadelphia2050* will explore recommendations that work to promote quality public spaces and equitable development in neighborhoods around the city. Through continued analysis and public engagement, *Philadelphia2050* will look to explore:

- How Philadelphia's land use policies can be used to help turn underutilized commercial corridors into thriving hubs of business and community activity that meet local needs.
- How Philadelphia can promote investment in neighborhoods while mitigating the negative impacts associated with neighborhood change.
- How Philadelphia can transform vacant and underutilized land into housing, public spaces, and other community serving uses.
- How Philadelphia can use available capital resources and attract funding partners to promote equitable upkeep of our public and neighborhood spaces.

Endnotes

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